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Author(s): John M. Kirk
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José Martí and the United States: A Further Interpretation

by JOHN M. KIRK

'El hombre más puro de la raza.'[1] This opinion of the Chilean poetess Gabriela Mistral sums up the general feelings of all critics and historians who have studied Martí's life: both as a Cuban patriot and as a sincere human being Martí evokes admiration from all sides. The same cannot be said, however, about his copious writings – twenty-seven volumes in the latest edition (*Editorial Nacional de Cuba*) – which have led to many differences of interpretation: for some he is the embodiment of Marxist philosophy,[2] while others have shown how little his views have in common with orthodox Socialism.[3] Within Cuba itself, political leaders as diverse in their ideals as Carlos Prío, Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro have all claimed to be putting into practice the philosophy of Martí.[4]

Martí's observations of North American society have also led to much controversy: for some historians they have been used as examples of a profound Cuban-U.S. friendship,[5] while others have underlined his bitter denunciations of North America.[6] The purpose of this paper is to concentrate on this latter aspect – Martí's interpretation of the United States – and to try and shed some light on the many apparent contradictions. By considering his early life and upbringing in Cuba, and by studying some of

1 This apt description of Martí by Gabriela Mistral was taken from the autograph album of a young Cuban girl. The actual inscription was 'No te olvides, si tienes un hermano o un hijo, de que vivió en tu tierra el hombre más puro de la raza, José Martí, y procura formarlo a su semejanza, batallador y limpio como un arcángel.' Cited by Gaspar Martillaro in his article 'José Martí, el hombre más puro de la raza,' *Archivo José Martí*, I (July–Aug. 1940), p. 57.

2 Cf. Center of Studies on Martí, *Trajectory and Actuality of Martí* (La Habana, National Printing House, 1961).

3 Luis A. Baralt, *Martí on the U.S.A.* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois Press, 1966), pp. xii–xiii.

4 See Ch. v, 'Symbolism in Social Groups,' of Richard Butler Gray's study, *José Martí, Cuban Patriot* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1966).

5 Félix Lizaso, *Martí, espíritu de la guerra justa* (La Habana, Editorial Ucar, García y Cía., 1944), p. 46.

6 Juan Marinello, 'El pensamiento de Martí y nuestra revolución socialista,' *Cuba Socialista*, II (Jan., 1962), p. 19.

his major newspaper reports and letters written during his many years spent in the United States, this article is intended to give a clearer picture of Martí's feelings for North America, and to discover which, if indeed any, of the interpretations of his work is most accurate.

José Martí was born in 1853, the son of Spanish parents of humble background. His schooling at the hands of Rafael María de Mendive, an outspoken Cuban nationalist, constituted an important step in Martí's education, and, in fact, Mendive was a true *padre espiritual* to his young charge. When Martí was fifteen years old, rebellion against the Spanish 'invaders' broke out in the town of Yara, a struggle which was to last for some ten years. Martí promptly joined the popular movement, editing two short-lived journals, *El diablo cojuelo* and *La Patria libre*. Soon afterwards Mendive was arrested and deported to Spain. In March 1870, Martí himself was arrested, convicted of 'anti-Spanish' activities (he was, in fact, jailed for criticizing a friend who was sympathetic to the Spanish cause), and subsequently sentenced to six years in political prison. However, after serving six months of hard labour, he became seriously ill, and his sentence was commuted to one of exile. Accordingly he was deported to Spain in January, 1871, and during the voyage to the *madre patria* was to write his first major political work, *El presidio político en Cuba*. Despite his early age, Martí had been exposed to much hardship, and, as a result, was fast developing a firm political consciousness.[7]

After three years of exile in Spain, Martí returned to Latin America. His experiences of the United States date from this period, for he visited New York briefly en route to Mexico. The next six years were characterized by frequent travels around Central America, and during this time his social and political theories were maturing quite noticeably. He lived in Mexico, Guatemala and Venezuela, all of which he apparently left because of disagreement with their oppressive political systems, claiming in fact that 'Con un poco de luz en la frente no se puede vivir donde mandan tiranos' (xx, 47).[8] In 1879 he returned to Cuba, taking advantage of a general amnesty following the defeat of Cuban revolutionary forces in 1878. Unfortunately, once again he criticized obvious abuses in the Spanish administration, and was again deported. This time he spent only three months in Spain before travelling to Caracas via New York. This latter city seemed

7 For further information on this important formative period in Martí's life, see the recent article by the author, 'El aprendizaje de Martí revolucionario: una aproximación psico-histórica,' *Cuadernos Americanos*, xxxvi, No. 1 (Jan.–Feb., 1977), pp. 108–122.

8 José Martí, *Obras completas* (La Habana, Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963–6). Future quotations of Martí will be from this edition, and references will be given in the text to volume and page numbers by roman and arabic numerals respectively).

to fascinate him, for he returned there in 1881. During the next fourteen years, apart from brief fund-raising trips to other parts of the United States, and to Latin America, New York was to be his home as well as the center for planning the liberation of Cuba.[9]

José Martí's fourteen years in the United States were a time of feverish activity. He was both writer and politician, devoting all of his time and energy to these twin objectives. His passing visit to New York in 1880 had helped enormously to establish his reputation among the Cuban exiles there, especially since he had been named Provisional President of the *Comité Revolucionario Cubano de Nueva York*, and his return in 1881 marked the beginning of a new era of revolutionary activity in that city. Within three years of his arrival a liberating expedition had been formed, under the leadership of General Máximo Gómez, but Martí, realizing that Gómez's plans stemmed more from personal ambition than from patriotic zeal, decided that the *caudillo*-type rule of Gómez which would replace Spanish exploitation was also morally wrong, and so reluctantly withdrew his support.[10] Above all else he wanted a true 'Cuba libre', and nothing less was acceptable to him.

His life in New York was a busy one. By 1890 he had been appointed consul for the Argentinian and Paraguayan governments, and was the undisputed leader of the Cuban exiles in the United States. His literary achievements were no less prodigious. He is regarded by many critics as having been the precursor of the first truly Latin American literary movement, *Modernismo*. In New York he also contributed to *The Sun* and *The Hour*, although of far greater importance was his work for the Latin American press. In all he wrote for some twenty Latin American newspapers, most of which published his famous *Escenas Norteamericanas* depicting the social conditions and mores of the United States. Hundreds of articles were produced in this series from 1881 to 1890, all of which – together with his other articles and letters written after 1890 – show a deep understanding of the spirit and aims of the 'monstruo del norte'.

In order to appreciate the evolution of Martí's views on the United States, it is interesting to examine his initial reflections on life in North America.

9 For more detailed information on the life of Martí, see the excellent biography by Jorge Mañach, *Martí, Apostle of Freedom* (New York, Devin-Adan Co., 1950).

10 His letter to Máximo Gómez in October, 1884, expresses this profound displeasure of Martí with what he interpreted as a selfish desire on the part of the two generals to exploit the revolutionary struggle of the Cuban people while furthering their own ends: 'Y es mi determinación de no contribuir en un ápice, por amor ciego a una idea en que me está yendo la vida, a traer a mi tierra a un régimen de despotismo personal, que sería más vergonzoso y funesto que el despotismo político que ahora soporta . . . Un pueblo no se funda, General, como se manda en un campamento' (1, 177).

Martí's first major writing post was with *The Hour*, which commissioned him to prepare a series of articles entitled 'Impressions of America (by a very fresh Spaniard)'. In the first of these articles, published on 10 July 1880, Martí expressed (in English) his pleasure at being – finally – in a free country: 'I am, at last, in a country where everyone looks like his own master. One can breathe freely freedom being here the foundation, the shield, the essence of life' (XIX, 103).

Another common theme found in both these 'Impressions' and in his more famous *Escenas Norteamericanas* was a profound admiration for the North American work ethic. On numerous occasions he expressed admiration for this immigrant-based society, whose principal aspiration he interpreted as being to construct a truly modern country, based upon hard work and progressive ideas:

Activity, devoted to trade, is truly immense. I was never surprised in any country of the world I have visited. Here I was surprised... I remarked that no one stood quietly on the corners, no door was shut an instant, no man was quiet. I stopped myself, I looked respectfully on this people, and I said goodbye for ever to that lazy life and poetical inutility of our European countries (XIX, 103).

Again in 1884 he praised in glowing terms the bold ingenuity of this creative country: no less than five hundred patents had been applied for in a single day. Martí, amazed, beseeched his own continent to consider this excellent example set by North America: 'Aplicación para nuestros talentos, es lo único que necesitamos en Hispanoamérica' (VIII, 438).

Constant references to the worker as 'un gran sacerdote, un sacerdote vivo' (VIII, 285) are found, often accompanied by an exhortation to Latin America to consider the astounding growth of the United States. If this country, he argued, could reach such a high standard of living in so short a time, and despite, too, its lack of unifying traditions, could not the same be expected of Latin America? Again in 1884 he praised this North American preoccupation with work after visiting a factory, noting:

quien entre en un taller norteamericano, donde las máquinas ruedan y rugen, y susurra el vapor y cuchichea, y pasan hombres con montes de artefactos a la espalda, y asciende el elevador . . . y hormiguean centenares de trabajadores, y no cesan el ímpetu, el esfuerzo, el movimiento frenético y fantástico, la labor regular y colosal, la maravilla de tamaño y tiempo – no se asombra de que tales aprendices de taller hayan hecho tal pueblo. – Lo maravilloso les es natural, porque se crían en ello. Lo acometen todo, porque lo han visto acometer todo. De nada se sorprenden, porque viven en medio de lo sorprendente (VIII, 408–9).

This feature of giving 'a fair day's work for a fair dollar' fascinated Martí, who never ceased to praise the industry and ingenuity of the North American worker. The field of education had also benefited from this prag-

matic attitude of its society at large, and Martí was, indeed, astounded by the ways in which this education was geared towards actually helping the development of the nation. Once again Martí encouraged the countries of Latin America to inspect, and in many cases to imitate, the experiments being conducted in the North. In September, 1885, for instance, he encouraged 'his' America to follow the example of the United States in implementing a more practical form of education, concluding 'En nuestros países ha de hacerse una revolución radical en la educación ... contra Teología, física; contra Retórica, Mecánica; contra preceptos de lógica ... preceptos agrícolas' (VIII, 279).

A good – and necessarily scientific – education was needed in Latin America, claimed Martí, an area in which the example set by the United States should be considered. The days of learning Greek and Latin were no more: 'El mundo nuevo requiere la escuela nueva' (VIII, 299). Consequently, Martí informed his readers, both in educational and technical fields the United States had shown the path along which 'Nuestra América' should follow. Indeed, with regard to scientific and agricultural education, North America was, by dint of hard work, the deserved leader of the world, and it was thus to Latin America's advantage to seek advice from there (VIII, 279).

The agricultural advancement of the United States particularly enthralled him, and in February, 1884, he expressed amazement at the common-sense attitude of the Dean of the School of Agriculture in Michigan who defended the advantages of manual work for the students of his college (VIII, 286). By the same token many harsh criticisms are found of the outdated, élitist educational systems of Cuba in particular and of Latin America in general, and on several occasions Martí advised these countries to send representatives to learn more relevant techniques in the United States. Then, as he commented in November, 1883, he hoped that an attempt would be made, after the representatives had returned to their respective countries, to bring about a much-needed modernization to the Latin American agricultural policies: 'La América del Sur, comarca agrícola, debiera enviar sus cultivadores a aprender el cultivo agrícola en los Estados Unidos' (VIII, 380).

More controversial is José Martí's view of politics as practised in North America. Despite the noble origins of the Republic, the basic picture he presented was one of a society only superficially interested in political life. He seemed to think that most people were so preoccupied with working hard to save money and better their standard of living that politics had little to offer them. Moreover, when compared to Latin America there were relatively few blatant social injustices in this society, a factor which rendered

its members basically apolitical. This Martí found understandable, although he refused to condone such a blindly materialistic direction being taken by North American society, counselling the citizens of 'Nuestra América' to take an active interest both in the economic development and the political life of their countries – and to learn from the mistakes of the United States:

Quiero que el pueblo de mi tierra no sea como éste [United States], una masa ignorante y apasionada, que va donde quieren llevarla, con ruidos que ella no entiende, los que tocan sobre sus pasiones como un pianista toca sobre el teclado. El hombre que halaga las pasiones populares es un vil. – El pueblo que abdica del uso de la razón, y que deja que se explote su país, es un pueblo vil (XXII, 73).

Politics in the United States had adopted a carnival atmosphere, Martí wrote, especially during election time. Then he saw candidates campaigning, 'bribing' the constituents with vast quantities of beer, while impressive parades wound their way through New York's crowded streets, past masses of billboards, all exhorting the public to vote for the different political candidates. There were few mentions of serious political debates, since it was generally acknowledged that the entire election procedure was of minor importance: Progress, Order and Prosperity were bound to continue whatever the outcome. Consequently, while admitting the many obvious injustices that resulted from poll irregularities, and in particular while resenting most bitterly the phenomenon of 'Bossism', the controlling of the major parties by influential leaders,[11] Martí still considered this unfortunate system infinitely more acceptable than the *total* lack of democracy in Cuba of that time. His conclusion was quite simply that such corrupt practises, while regrettable, at least constituted a step in the right direction: '¡Oh! muchos votos se venden; pero hay más que no se venden' (X, 123).

But if Martí's attitude was somewhat neutral in his description of the apolitical mass, the same cannot be said of his treatment of the small, but powerful, upper class in the United States. In particular Martí condemned the super-élite which pulled the main political strings behind the scenes. The mayor of Brooklyn, for example, 'era cera blanda en las manos del "boss" formidable, del cacique organizador de las organizaciones políticas de la ciudad' (IX, 107). The original pioneers (now rich businessmen of the cities) represented what Martí called the 'ricos de la primera generación', all of whom Martí depicted in a sympathetic light as they recalled with nostalgia the menial chores that they had undertaken before amassing their

[11] Writing for the Caracas newspaper, *La Opinión Nacional*, in 1881, Martí condemned in most vigorous fashion the intrigues of the exponents of 'bossisn': 'Allí estaba descrito el *boss* odioso; el cabecilla de partido; el que prepara las elecciones, las tuerce, las aprovecha, las da a sus enemigos, las niega a sus enemigos, las vende a sus adversarios; el que domina los cuerpos electorales; el que exige a los empleados dinero para llevar a cabo las elecciones que han de conservarlos en sus empleos' (IX, 97).

fortunes. However, their descendants, the 'ricos de la segunda generación', refused to consider the lowly origins of their predecessors. (In fact they now 'ven como blasón de indecoro en los neorricos aquello que fue para sus padres blasón de honra: la creación de sí' (IX, 108).)

It was these pretentious upstarts, Martí argued, who were slowly taking control of the true North American spirit. Their principal intention was quite simply to make vast amounts of money, and subsequently to use these funds to secure their influence in North American society. Indeed, as early as 1881 Martí had noted that 'una aristocracia política ha nacido de esta sociedad pecuniaria y domina periódicos, vence en elecciones, y suele imperar en asambleas' (IX, 108). It was this élite which, in Martí's opinion, deserved severe censure, for they represented the greatest threat to the purity of ideals with which the United States was first conceived, and which Martí defended at all times.[12] It was this same political élite which he would later condemn most violently as the greatest obstacle, in his view, to a true Inter-American understanding.

The reader of Martí's reports on the United States receives the impression that, had the American Republic continued along the same path as that blazed by the 'founding fathers', Martí would have given his unequivocal support to such a political direction. However, based upon his observations of the many fundamental problems faced by North American society, Martí steadily became aware that his hopes had been ill-founded, and that the United States had carelessly abused its vast potential. Racial problems were an everyday occurrence, and Chinese, Indians and black Americans were widely discriminated against; political life was both cynically regarded by the public at large and widely abused by the 'políticos de oficio' (XIV, 373); industrial magnates and powerful labor groups faced each other menacingly, all leading Martí to predict in March, 1882, that in the United States 'se librará la batalla social tremenda' (IX, 278). The grand social experiment had failed, Martí concluded: 'este Norte es como momia galvanizada a puro ejemplo y tesón, y tierra de donde todo nos expulsa' (III, 111).

[12] Typical of this fervent admiration of Martí for the 'founding fathers' of the United States was his comment in 1885: 'Yo esculpiría en pórfido las estatuas de los hombres maravillosos que fraguaron la Constitución de los Estados Unidos de América . . . y cada cierto número de años, establecería una semana de peregrinación nacional' (XII, 405).

Some five years later Martí expressed his profound displeasure with the direction being taken by political life in the United States, while showing his undying faith in the political judgment of Abraham Lincoln: 'a vivir Lincoln hoy, no estaría con los que le sucedieron, ni con los demócratas híbridos e indecisos, sino con los que, preparando cosa mejor, oyen con alarma y asombro que un partido político, el partido de la mayoría, proclame . . . esta frase típica y terrible: "El país quiere resultados, y se cuide poco del modo con que se consigan"' (XII, 405).

Yet the picture was not entirely black, since Martí found numerous lessons that the countries of ' Nuestra América ' could learn from the experience of the United States. Mention was made earlier of Martí's great admiration for the North American ' work ethic ' and of his particular interest in the inherently ' practical ' system of education that he advocated Latin America to develop. Martí also seemed impressed by the inviolable right of freedom of speech which all U.S. citizens possessed. Although somewhat disappointed that this liberty should be taken advantage of in order to plan destruction, as in the case of several New York-Irish immigrants who plotted openly to overthrow the British control of Ireland, Martí, nevertheless, bestowed great praise on the United States' Constitution, which theoretically allowed all men to have their voice heard, whatever their political beliefs. When he attended political reunions in May, 1883, following the death of Karl Marx, and heard the call for Revolution – and more specifically the destruction of the capitalist system – he could not but marvel at the magnitude of a country which allowed revolution to be preached, a liberty which possibly could have led to its own destruction (IX, 388–9). On several other occasions he expressed his agreement with the women's suffrage movements, and was pleased that women were taking advantage of this privilege in order to make their voices heard. Free speech, he claimed, was an absolute necessity for any truly civilized nation, and Martí expressed his profound admiration for these many basic liberties and opportunities open to the vast majority of American citizens.

In Martí's work there are continuous comparisons between the Latin and North American ways of life. The latter was seen as a hardy, ' soulless ', and, at times, cruel society, but one which, nevertheless, had been based upon a firm foundation of liberty and on a tradition of liberty. Indeed, as late as August, 1889, when Martí was interviewed for the magazine *Export and Finance*, he expressed the admiration felt by many Latin American countries for the mighty nation to the north: ' En realidad, por lo que al sentimiento respecta, todas las repúblicas de Sudamérica miran a los Estados Unidos como una nación amiga, y proverbialmente aluden a este país como " Madre de Repúblicas " ' (VIII, 79–80). There were, indeed, major faults and serious problems in the social conditions of North America, Martí noted, but these tended to be of minor importance when compared to the broad sweep of social inequality, and to the widespread abuse of power prevalent in Latin America.

In many spheres, then, the United States compared quite favorably with ' Nuestra América ' as Martí called Latin America. He regretted deeply the overpowering concern of the North with purely material things,[13] but at the

[13] Writing in 1886, for instance, Martí analysed the basic characteristics of the ' new ' Ameri-

same time was not oblivious to the basic social injustice found throughout Latin America, despite an abundance of spirit or 'alma'. In 1881 Martí commented on the basic differences in the social philosophies of the two Americas: 'vivimos devorados por un sublime demonio interior que nos empuja a la persecución infatigable de un ideal de amor o gloria... No así aquellos espíritus tranquilos, turbados sólo por el ansia de la posesión de una fortuna' (IX, 126). This quixotic yearning, Martí suggested, while it should not be shunned entirely, should at least be moderated, in order to allow more progressive ideas to percolate through from the North.

Yet, however much Martí admired the noble origins of the great American Republic, and the many opportunities available to its citizens, in his opinion the United States' dealings with 'Nuestra América' left a great deal to be desired. Consequently, added to Martí's displeasure at the materialistic direction upon which North American society seemed determined was his eventual conviction that the United States as a country was becoming increasingly intent upon extending its dominion over Latin America. Accordingly Martí's reports – or rather warnings now – adopted a more concerned tone. Typical of his feelings was a report published in January, 1882:

Los hijos de los peregrinos tuvieron también su fiesta: mas ¡ay! que ya no son humildes, ni pisan las nieves del Cabo Cod con borceguíes de trabajadores, sino que se ajustan al pie rudo la bota marcial; y ven de un lado al Canadá, y del otro a México... Decía así el Senador Hawley: "Y cuando hayamos tomado a Canadá y a México, y reinemos sin rivales sobre el continente, ¿qué especie de civilización vendremos a tener en lo futuro?" ¡Una terrible a fe: la de Cartago! (IX, 205–6).

Time and time again Martí warned his fellow Latin Americans that the United States was totally ignorant of the culture and history of her southern neighbours, and this, combined with the ever-increasing phenomenon regarded euphemistically as 'pioneer spirit', augured badly for future relations between the Americas. His mission subsequently became one of enlightening his readers, or as he put it, 'definir, avisar, poner en guardia, revelar los secretos del éxito, en apariencia – y en apariencia sólo – maravillosos de este país' (VIII, 268).

Martí thus perceived a strong annexationist desire, particularly on the part of the states to the west and south, where large financial interests were blind to the national aspirations of 'Nuestra América', seeing in the countries to the south merely another set of 'natural resources' to exploit. Their hard-headed attitude, supported by a set of pragmatic 'get-rich-quick' policies, and by influential political backers, caused Martí to conclude that

can nation, concluding that a common trait of this entire society was 'esta rudeza general de espíritu que aquí aflige tanto a las mentes expansivas y delicadas. Cada cual para sí. La fortuna como único objeto de la vida' (X, 375).

a minority of large U.S. concerns were quite prepared to risk involving their country in a needless war, simply so that they personally could make vast commercial gains. These representatives of the ' ricos de la segunda generación ' were thus destroying all that the original founders stood for, and Martí roundly condemned them.

Towards the end of 1889 there occurred a very definite shift in sensibility in Martí's reports: his basically sympathetic attitude became noticeably more critical as he attacked the powerful political élite which was encouraging territorial expansion into ' Nuestra América '. Concerned less now with preparing his famous *Escenas Norteamericanas* for his Latin American readers (by early 1892 he had ceased to write for the multitude of periodicals in Spanish America to which he had earlier contributed), Martí now busied himself with preparations for the campaign that he hoped would lead to the full liberation of Cuba. This campaign was threatened seriously, though, in 1889 as talk re-surfaced in the United States as to whether that country should purchase Cuba from the Spanish government in order to turn the Island into an American protectorate. Then on 16 March 1889, the *Philadelphia Manufacturer* published a highly critical article entitled ' Do we want Cuba? ' (later reprinted in the *Evening Post* of New York), to which Martí wrote a blistering reply.

Of particular concern to Martí was the conclusion of the original article which, given his heartfelt distrust of U.S. interest in ' Nuestra América ', was totally unacceptable to him: ' La única esperanza que pudiéramos tener de habilitar a Cuba para la dignidad de Estado, sería americanizarla por completo, cubriéndola con gente de nuestra propia raza ' (I, 234). For Martí, any attempt to sell his *patria* as if it were some negotiable merchandise, and, of course, without taking into account the wishes of the people, was completely unacceptable – particularly when the prospective purchaser was the United States. Martí felt that he knew this society well enough to know that such a change of overlords could only result to the detriment of Cuba, and so he redoubled his revolutionary activity.

The six-page reply of Martí, ' Vindicación de Cuba ', which the *Evening Post* published, can truly be taken as representing accurately Martí's rapidly-increasing disillusionment with the ' land of Lincoln '. Before, he had been deeply troubled both by the cold-blooded attempts to disregard the best interests of ' Nuestra América ' and subsequently by growing U.S. economic penetration into the countries to the south. Now, however, that the United States was seriously considering the idea of purchasing the Island and of ' americanizarla por completo ', Martí spoke out loudly and bravely against such action, stating the opinion of many Cubans on the United States of America:

Admiran esta nación, la más grande de cuantas erigió jamás la libertad; pero desconfían de los elementos que, como gusanos en la sangre, han comenzado en esta República portentosa su obra de destrucción. Han hecho de los héroes de este país sus propios héroes... pero no pueden creer honradamente que el individualismo excesivo, la adoración de la riqueza, y el júbilo prolongado de una victoria terrible, estén preparando a los Estados Unidos para ser la nación típica de la libertad, donde no ha de haber opinión basada en el apetito inmoderado del poder, ni adquisición o triunfos contrarios a la bondad y a la justicia. Amamos a la patria de Lincoln, tanto como tememos a la patria de Cutting (I, 237).

This tone of consternation at the attempt of the United States to extend its influence into Latin America became increasingly noticeable in Martí's work after this revived interest in purchasing Cuba from Spain, since he now realized that, in order to win political independence for the *patria*, not only did they have to defeat the Spanish forces but also to keep the United States firmly at bay. Writing in April 1889, Martí expressed his profound distress at such a selfish desire to purchase the Island, all the more damnable, Martí reminded his readers, because only a century earlier the United States had embarked upon a similar struggle for freedom: '¿Quién medita siquiera en el proyecto ya público de la compra de Cuba, donde no se ha secado todavía la sangre que el vecino astuto vio derramar, por la misma carta de principios con que se rebeló él contra sus dueños, sin tender un manojo de hilos, sin tender los brazos?' (XII, 168). The events of 1889 would completely dispel any remaining doubts that Martí might have entertained concerning U.S. interest in 'Nuestra América', as can be seen from his letter to Enrique Estrázulas:

ahora que estoy fuera de mí, porque lo que desde años vengo temiendo y anunciando se viene encima, que es la política conquistadora de los Estados Unidos, que ya anuncian oficialmente por boca de Blaine y Harrison su deseo de tratar de mano alta a todos nuestros países, como dependencias naturales de éste, y de comprar a Cuba (XX, 203).

Two other major contributing factors to the radicalization of Martí were the first Inter-American Conference, held in Washington from the end of 1889 until April, 1890 (upon which Martí reported in great detail), and the International Monetary Conference in 1891, at which he acted as the official representative for the Uruguayan government. The first of these two conferences gathered together for the first time representatives of almost all of the Latin American countries. From the very beginning of the conference everything was geared towards convincing the delegates of the value of having closer ties with the most powerful country of the Americas, the United States: there was an elaborate 5,500-mile train journey designed to impress the representatives with an exhibition of American industry, the American

press continually listed the advantages to be gained by the various Latin American Republics through closer ties with the United States, while at the same time advocating hard-line treatment for those countries that turned down such an opportunity. The delegates generally appeared flattered by this constant attention afforded them by the host country. (At one point Martí described how ' los negros van y vienen, diez para cada huésped, cepillo en mano ' (VI, 42)).

Faced with this high-powered campaign to win the allegiance of the countries of ' Nuestra América ', Martí could only urge the Latin American representatives to probe beneath the veneer of progress and material wealth found in the United States. By this time he was rather suspicious of the dubious motives that lay behind the organization of this conference, and lost few opportunities to explain these personal fears to his readers:

Jamás hubo en América, de la independencia acá, asunto que requiera más sensatez, ni obligue a más vigilancia, ni pida examen más claro y minucioso, que el convite que los Estados Unidos potentes, repletos de productos invendibles, y determinados a extender sus dominios en América, hacen a las naciones americanas de menos poder, ligadas por el comercio libre y útil con los pueblos europeos, para ajustar una liga contra Europa y cerrar tratos con el resto del mundo. De la tiranía de España supo salvarse la América española; y ahora, después de ver con ojos judiciales los antecedentes, causas y factores del convite, urge decir, porque es la verdad, que ha llegado para la América española la hora de declarar su segunda independencia (VI, 46).

Although on a much lower key, Martí's direct participation at the International Monetary Conference (held in Washington from January to April, 1891) was of even greater importance in warning the Latin American delegates against any lasting ties that they might make with the United States. The Conference had been summoned with two purposes in mind: first, to win the support of the Latin American delegates on the subject of bimetallism, which would allow gold and silver to be circulated on equal terms (instead of the traditional system that set only gold against paper currency) and second, and far more important, to encourage the Latin American nations to sever their economic ties with Europe (which continent was opposed to any such change in currency matters), and subsequently to increase their trade with North America. If the United States' proposal were accepted, the result would be partially beneficial to Mexico and Peru (and, of course, to the United States, at that time the world's leading silver producer), while almost all of the remaining Latin American republics would receive little, if any, benefit. Moreover, if the proposal of the United States were accepted, this could very possibly lead to a drastic cut-back in trade between Latin America and Europe, with the result that ' Nuestra América ' would become increasingly dependent on the United States for her trade.

An examination of the Minutes of the Monetary Conference reveals the active role played by Martí, who was a leading member of two important committees, one to study the credentials of the representatives, and the other to debate the proposal of the U.S. delegates on bimetallism. It was in this second role that he delivered one of the most important speeches of the conference. Martí was convinced that few Latin American countries would benefit from the suggested changes, and was also extremely concerned about the loss of sovereignty that he saw might well result if the proposal dealing with bimetallism was approved. He claimed that this was not the appropriate time to exert pressure on the great European commercial powers, so that they might enter into such an agreement. As a result, this committee recommended that:

While fully recognizing the great convenience and importance to commerce of the creation of an international coin or coins, it is not deemed expedient at preset to recommend the same, in view of the attitude of some of the great commercial powers of Europe toward silver as one of the metallic currencies.[14]

This last phase in the radicalization of Martí's thought, initiated by his letter to the *Evening Post*, was characterized by an increasingly militant tone, as José Martí devoted his attention both to the task of overthrowing the Spanish control of Cuba and of making his fellow Latin Americans aware of U.S. interest in 'Nuestra América'. As late as October, 1889, Martí had been prepared to allow the United States the benefit of the doubt (in a letter to Gonzalo de Quesada he stated how the United States 'está a nuestra puerta como un enigma, por lo menos' (I, 250)), although soon afterwards (and noticeably after the two conferences) he lost all hope of Cuba ever receiving a fair hearing from the North, which he now called 'un pueblo diverso, formidable y agresivo, que no nos tiene por igual suyo, y nos niega las condiciones de igualdad... un pueblo que se tiene por su superior y lo quiere para fuente de azúcar, y pontón estratégico' (IV, 424).[15]

Despite his ever-strong admiration for the founders of the great republic to the north, Martí now saw the United States as a mighty imperialist

[14] *Minutes of the International Monetary Commission* (Washington, 1891), pp. 49–50.

[15] Martí asked his readers to evaluate this move by the United States, while warning them of the many fundamental aspects of the U.S. national character that were very different from the Latin American equivalent. North Americans, he maintained, 'creen en la necesidad, en el derecho bárbaro, como único derecho: "esto será nuestro, porque lo necesitamos." Creen en la superioridad incontrastable de 'la raza anglosajona contra la raza latina. Creen en la bajeza de la raza negra, que esclavizaron ayer y vejan hoy, y de la india que exterminan. Creen que los pueblos de Hispanomérica están formados, principalmente, de indios y negros. Mientras no sepan más de Hispanomérica los Estados Unidos y la respeten más . . . ¿pueden los Estados Unidos convidar a Hispanoamérica a una unión sincera y útil para Hispanoamérica? ¿Conviene a Hispanoamérica la unión política y económica de los Estados Unidos?' (VI, 160).

power, and commented in no uncertain terms on the tokenism of professed 'co-operation' as a mere smokescreen for annexation. Martí's subsequent exhortations to his fellow Latin Americans, encouraging them to preserve the true spirit of 'Nuestra América', despite the many advances from the North, reached a peak in Martí's last dramatic letter to his friend Manuel Mercado in 1895:

> Mi hermano queridísimo ... ya estoy todos los días en peligro de dar mi vida por mi país y por mi deber – puesto que lo entiendo y tengo ánimos con que realizarlo – de impedir a tiempo con la independencia de Cuba que se extienda por las Antillas los Estados Unidos y caigan, con esa fuerza más, sobre nuestras tierras de América. Cuanto hice hasta hoy, y haré, es para eso ... Viví en el monstruo y le conozco las entrañas: – y mi honda es la de David (IV, 167–168).

José Martí died in battle the following day.

In the year 1953, centenary of Martí's birth, a massive campaign was organized in Cuba to make the Cuban people (at times almost forcibly) aware of Martí: coins bearing the portrait of the *Apóstol* were minted, many sets of commemorative postage stamps were issued, and hundreds of monuments were dedicated to him. As I have explained elsewhere,[16] this campaign revolved directly around the idea of presenting a 'neutered' view of Martí: his ideas for the radical re-structuring of Cuban society were hardly discussed, his political observations were, of course, ignored or else toned down, and he was widely presented as being not only a fervent admirer of the United States, but also as a stalwart defender of Pan-Americanism.

It was, ironically, also in 1953 that the beginning of a new, and very different, level of interest was announced after a young lawyer was arrested while attempting to storm the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. When asked who had instigated this revolt, the lawyer, Fidel Castro, informed the astonished court that it had been no less than Martí himself.[17] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether or not Martí's precepts have been integrated into the policies of the Cuban Revolution, although in many ways it appears quite obvious that José Martí is an

[16] 'From *Apóstol* to Revolutionary: The Changing Image of José Martí,' Paper presented at the 1977 meeting of the Society for Latin American Studies, York, April 1977.

[17] In his defence speech, Fidel Castro also noted how he had not been allowed to read Martí's works while awaiting trial. 'De igual modo se prohibió que llegaran a mis manos los libros de Martí; parece que la censura de la prisión los consideró demasiado subversivos. ¿O será porque yo dije que Martí era et autor intelectual del 26 de julio? Se impidió, además, que trajese a este juicio ninguna obra de consulta sobre cualquier otra materia. ¡No importa en absoluto! Traigo en el corazón las doctrinas del Maestro y en el pensamiento las nobles ideas de todos los hombres que han defendido la libertad de los pueblos.' Fidel Castro, *La historia me absolverá* (*La Habana*, Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1973), p. 25.

eminently more appropriate symbol for the Castro administration than he has been for many of the earlier regimes in Cuba's chequered history.

This does not excuse, however, the misuse of Martí's reputation on the part of Cuba's revolutionary leaders, who for some years were given to publicizing several of Martí's more dramatic denunciations of the United States, while choosing to ignore Martí's (many) observations on the lessons to be learned – by Cuba – from North America. This attitude on the part of the Cuban intellectuals was understandable in the early years of the revolutionary process, particularly in view of the need to stabilize the Revolution, while at the same time protecting it against external pressure imposed upon Cuba by the United States: the Bay of Pigs invasion, economic sanctions enforced first by the United States and subsequently by the OAS, the Missile Crisis, and covert CIA activity. Typical of the Cuban interpretation of Martí at this time was the observation of Juan Marinello, who clearly relished the opportunity to present the other side of the coin previously ignored by traditionalist writers in Cuba.[18]

Gradually, however, as the years passed and as national confidence grew both in the *fidelista* government, and in the ability of Cuba to survive, as the economy became comparatively stable, and as sweeping social changes were implemented in Cuba, so a considerable shift occurred in the revolutionary interpretation of Martí. Indicative of this maturity of the Revolution (the 'Institutionalization' as it is usually termed) was the noticeable change in the presentation of Martí by Cuban *martianos*, the early, highly critical, references to the United States being replaced now by a more reasonable, objective survey. Typical of this new attitude (found in Cuba since the 1970s) is the observation on Martí's views of the United States made by Roberto Fernández Retamar in a recent study:

> Pero no se trata de rechazar mecánicamente, en bloque, a los Estados Unidos, se trata, tan sólo, de hacer ver lo negativo que llevan en su seno (' tal vez es ley que en la raíz de los árboles grandes aniden los gusanos '), y el inmenso peligro que representan para la América latina. Por lo demas, en los Estados Unidos, como en Europa, mucho hay de útil para nuestras tierras. En primer lugar, el saber: la ciencia, la técnica, y el vasto caudal de las artes y las letras, que Martí divulgó ampliamente entre los lectores de lengua española.[19]

[18] 'En efecto, nuestro libertador pudo observar desde las "entrañas del monstruo," no sólo su voracidad ilimitada sino los elementos que alimentaban sus depredaciones.

Una tercera parte de la obra de Martí, y quizá la mejor, está destinada a ofrecernos in panorama exacto y sorprendente del "Norte revuelto y brutal que nos desprecia." ' Juan Marinello, ' El pensamiento de Martí y nuestra revolución socialista,' *Cuba Socialista*, II (Jan., 1962), p. 19.

[19] Roberto Fernández Retamar, ' Introducción a Martí,' *José Martí: Cuba, Nuestra América, los Estados Unidos*, ed Fernández Retamar (México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973), p. xlii.

Thus a new and invigorating stage has been reached by historians in Cuba, and all that remains now is for their North American counterparts to develop a similarly thorough, and necessarily objective, attitude to Martí. In this context the opinion of the late Manuel Pedro González on the superlative moral qualities of Martí seems a fitting tribute: 'If the situation had been reversed and the United States had been the weak nation and Cuba or Latin America the oppressing power, he would have struggled with equal fervor and heroism in defense of the United States against the abusive country. Justice and freedom were indivisible for him.' [20]

But let us leave the last word with Martí. As late as 1894, after the trauma of the two Inter-American Conferences in the United States, and of increasing general hostility towards Latin America, and in particular towards Cuba and Mexico, Martí still did not discount the possibility of establishing honest and lasting ties with the United States, referring to that country as 'la América que no es nuestra, cuya enemistad no es cuerdo ni viable fomentar, y de la que con el decoro firme y la sagaz independencia no es imposible, y es útil, ser amigos' (VIII, 35). It is to be hoped that, as Cuba and the United States head towards the seemingly inevitable re-establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations, both sides will bear Martí's words in mind.

[20] Manuel Pedro González, *José Martí: Epic Chronicler of the United States in the Eighties* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1953), p. 21.